



## SUCCESS STORY

### NGOs Make Inroads Despite Political Crisis



No Sectarianism

*Hayat Dalal, a young activist with No Sectarianism, discusses the group's vision with a Lebanese man during a book exhibition.*

***“As a Lebanese NGO, we are convinced that our role is more crucial than ever, especially in the current political crisis.” —Ziad Akl, president of the Scientific Research Foundation, an OTI grantee.***

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**March 2008** – In the midst of a presidential vacuum and political deadlock, Lebanon’s civil society forges ahead with efforts to bridge growing divides between the country’s confessional communities.

In this fragile country with a history of conflict, failure to elect a new president over the past four months has given rise to fears of renewed violence as the main political groups clash over power-sharing arrangements. Despite a volatile situation and an uncertain future, Lebanese nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continue to act as service providers, voices of change, and consensus builders.

Since September 2007, the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) in Lebanon has built ties with diverse partners working to diffuse the tensions exacerbated by polarized political rhetoric. Through small grants and technical assistance, these NGOs are creating youth committees, using alternative media to deliver social messages, and helping to resolve community-level conflicts.

Though they work across multiple sectors, OTI partners have one thing in common: a commitment to bringing people together against the tide of divisive national politics.

“Although things look very dim right now, I do believe that the situation in Lebanon is bound to improve,” said Zeina Roueiheb of the Maharat Foundation, an OTI partner working with young journalists and media students to promote objective news coverage. Roueiheb is confident that NGOs like Maharat can help foster “tolerance and acceptance among the Lebanese.”

As Lebanon prepares to commemorate the anniversary of the 15-year civil war, NGO activists hope to build the foundations for lasting peace. Hayat Dalal of No Sectarianism, a nascent youth group, said NGOs are the best vehicle for facing the current crisis because they “work on the ground, with the people,” often filling gaps left by weakened government institutions.

Through a grant from OTI, No Sectarianism is reaching out to hundreds of Lebanese youth with one simple message: “Whatever our sect or religion, we live together on the same land and Lebanon is for all of us.”